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A
P L A N
O F
R E F O R M,

PROPOSED TO THE
Christian People,

A
SERMON,

Preached, at ANDERSTON the First Day of the
N E W Y E A R,

BY
JAMES STEUART,

MINISTER.

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R E F O R M

Christian People

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Plan of Reform, &c.

LEVIT. XXVI. 23, 24.

And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.

THERE are few periods in the history of Europe in which the minds of men have been more keenly agitated, their passions more inflamed, and kingdoms more violently convulsed, than the present. A discontented and turbulent spirit prevails at home; an ancient and powerful monarchy has been overthrown abroad; other mighty nations are alarmed and dread insurrection and convulsion too. The same cause has produced these wonderful effects, a prevailing rage for *Reform*. I would therefore seize the spirit of the times, and

thence take occasion to exhibit to the Christian people a plan of MORAL REFORM.

REFORMATION is ever pleasing to God : It is his will that men should “ cease to “ do evil, that they should learn to do “ well, and be perfect even as their Father who is in heaven is perfect.” It is the design of the GOSPEL, and of all its divine institutions, to reform a degenerate world, by rectifying the disorders of the human soul, and forming mankind to the love and practice of universal goodness. All the dispensations of his wise and righteous PROVIDENCE have the same benevolent design and tendency. If he bless a nation with peace and prosperity, it is to melt their hearts into ingenuous gratitude, and allure them to the obedience of love. If he visit them with great calamities, it is to correct them for their sins, to subdue their rebellious spirits, and reduce them to his righteous government. And when a people harden their hearts, and refuse to be reformed by all his mercies and by all his judgments, it is an awful prelude to their overthrow. This is the instructive

language of my text. Says God to the tribes of Israel, " If ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins."

As nothing is more devoutly to be wished than REFORMATION, if any plan can be suggested that promises to give happiness to individuals, peace to society, purity to the church, health to the constitution, and vigour to government, it has a decided claim to the attention and support of every person who is a friend to mankind, who has the good of society, the good of Zion, and the good of his country at heart. The most promising plan that has occurred to me is the following :

To begin with a PERSONAL REFORM, to carry the Reform into our FAMILIES, to extend it to SEMINARIES and SCHOOLS OF LEARNING, and thence, by a natural progress, it will extend to CHURCH AND STATE, and produce an UNIVERSAL REFORM.

First, As the ground work of the whole, we must begin with a PERSONAL REFORM. Societies and nations are composed of individuals, and if the great mass be corrupt it must be owing to the corruption of its component parts; the fountain is poisoned by the various streams that supply it.— This demonstrates the necessity of a personal Reform: And I sincerely believe there never was a period when this was more necessary than at present. If we survey the manners of the times we shall see that a life of luxury and sinful pleasure, a loose, immoral, and licentious walk, a contempt of religion, and a profanation of holy things—these enormities stain the annals of the present age.

The great BODY of the PEOPLE remind me of the human body when it is infected with a complication of disorders, in consequence of which it is daily failing off and declining. Drunkenness, idleness, prodigality, a turbulent and disorderly spirit, pervade the *lower ranks of society*. These are the effects of their prosperity and fulness of bread. But what a curse is prosperity when it is per-

verted to the worst of purposes, and made the minister of dissipation and vice ! When the mechanic or labourer repairs to the tavern as soon as he receives his wages, spends the night in a round of riot and uproar, leaves his poor family to starve, when they might have plenty ; and when he goes home at an untimely hour insults and abuses a lonely and broken-hearted woman, whom he ought to cherish and support.

Such is the thoughtless and dissipated life of many while they enjoy the blessing of *health* ; and if, in the providence of God, they be visited with *sickness*, they are immediately beggars upon the public, and their meanness of spirit can only be equalled by their thoughtless prodigality of life.

Nor do opulent MASTERS less need a reform than the servants and labourers whom they employ. A flourishing trade has rapidly encreased their riches, but in the same proportion it has encreased their pride and prodigality. Like a ship at sea, full of sail but wanting ballast, many are carried out of a steady course by the long-

continued gale of prosperity; and, if at last, a storm arises and they be ship-wrecked, few will deplore *their* loss, who, in prosperity, forget themselves, forget their God, and forget the religion in which they were carefully educated. The higher ranks are often complaining of the lower, that they are growing loose in their morals, and insolent in their behaviour; that they are idle, dissipated, and licentious. But though there be too much ground for the complaint, yet it is made with a bad grace by those who recommend dissipation and licentiousness by their own example, and pervert the God-like power of doing good, to sap the foundation of morality, and thereby destroy the virtue and happiness both of individuals and communities. What numbers are ruined by vices which (from a silly affectation and vanity) they imitate and borrow from the great! When these are loose in their morals, profane in their conversation, despisers of God and religion, they do more to ruin the morals of the people than all the snares and allurements of guilty pleasure. But if the eminently great were also eminently good,

their character would be esteemed and revered, and their example would resemble the heavenly bodies, dispensing a general light and heat, and scattering benefits and blessings through an extensive sphere. A pious, but poor man, may attempt to correct and reform the morals of the age, but his endeavours are little regarded because he has not weight and influence : But what a pious poor man cannot do with all his persuasion and argument, that a pious rich man can often accomplish without any argument at all, namely, by the silent authority and powerful allurements of his example.

Thus the REFORM must circulate thro' all the ranks of life. The opulent part of society must be temperate in their enjoyments, exemplary in their walk, and observant of the laws and institutions of religion. The mechanic and laborious part of society must be sober, industrious, honest, and orderly in *their* deportment. This will lay the foundation of UNIVERSAL REFORM, and will cause that righteousness to spread and flourish which at once “ adorns “ and exalts a nation.”

Secondly, From INDIVIDUALS the Reform must be carried into FAMILIES. Families are the first schools where youth are educated : There they receive their first ideas, their first impressions, their first instructions; and if they are neglected or poisoned there, who does not see that the consequences may be fatal both to themselves and to society. The want of good instruction and good example to children and servants is like a *radical* error which can hardly be corrected afterwards. There the foundation of immorality and vice is laid, because if no care be taken to improve the minds of youth when their minds are most susceptible of improvement, there is little hope they will afterwards do well; yea there is every reason to fear they will turn out bad in every sphere and relation of life; undutiful children, unfaithful servants, worthless members of the church, the pests of society, and the scourge of mankind.

But what is more to be deplored, if no remedy be applied to the disorder it will continually increase, and, like a deadly plague, will spread still farther and farther

till religion and virtue be banished from society, till impiety and wickedness reign predominate, and the world be ripe for ruin.—Believe it, parents ; they who, under your inspection, grow up in ignorance and vice will entail that sad inheritance upon their children ; and *they* may entail it upon *theirs* ; so that many generations may perish through your neglect, whereas *your* zeal and diligence may be remembered and imitated by succeeding ages when you are mouldering in the silent grave. The stock which they received from you, may, with rich improvement, be communicated to multitudes, so that generations, yet unborn, may learn from your example to live the life of the righteous.—On the whole, God only knows what a flourishing church, what a blessed society may spring from one godly family, what a plentiful harvest may be reaped from a single seed ; and, on the other hand, it is impossible to say how many souls may perish through the treacherous neglect of one person.

Besides, as all communities are supplied from families, parents should consider that

the public has a claim upon their fidelity and diligence to bring up their children for the public good : and their laudable exertions to discharge the claim are the brightest display of their patriotism and public spirit. Good children are the rising hopes of Church and State ; and parents cannot leave the Church and State a better legacy. This gives the public the best security that religion will be propagated to posterity, and that “ the generations to come shall know and fear the Lord.” Next to his being the friend of God, it was the greatest honour of Abraham that he was “ the Father of the faithful ;” and the religious education of his family was so pleasing to God, and so honourable to himself, that it is recorded to his everlasting commendation. “ I know Abraham that he will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment.”

Thirdly, Our REFORM must be extended to SEMINARIES and SCHOOLS of LEARNING. The surest foundation both of pu-

blic and private happiness is laid in the good education of youth. There are several ways of reforming a degenerate nation. It may be greatly reformed by the fidelity and zeal of conscientious parents; it may be greatly reformed by the good example of those in superior stations; it may be greatly reformed by the impartial administration of public justice; it may be greatly reformed by the sacred institutions of religion; but there is not a more likely and promising way of reforming it, than that of training up its youth in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord." They are the most precious treasure a nation can possess. Parents and teachers are appointed the guardians and keepers of the treasure; if they be faithful to their trust, the treasure will be secure, and will increase in value; if they be faithless the treasure will be lost, and with it the hope, the strength, and glory of the state.—How often do men take pleasure in planting trees and shrubs, in rearing them up, and seeing them flourishing and fruitful. But O! what greater pleasure should they take in planting and rearing a human soul,

in seeing it flourishing and loaded with the fruits of righteousness ! But if youth be cruelly neglected, if they be destitute of moral instruction, if they are left to run wild in a dreary wilderness where men, more dangerous than beasts of prey, are lying in wait to devour them, hapless and forlorn creatures ! they will perish thro' the neglect of their treacherous and faithless guides.

When I read the history of some ancient nations, I am delighted with the care they took to form the minds and morals of their youth. When ANTIPATER demanded of the SPARTANS fifty of their *children* as hostages, the SPARTANS were in deep distress, and besought him rather to take an hundred of their *men*. The reason they gave does equal honour to their heads and to their hearts, " that their children might " not be deprived of the excellent education of their country."

Some of the virtuous nations of antiquity gave their children two advantages which ours but seldom enjoy ; and to these

advantages they owed the future lustre of their lives. One of these advantages was, their teachers were always the best of men their country could produce. Their education was often committed to the Magistrates, who were always the most respectable characters for wisdom, for probity, and for their veneration of the religion and laws of their country; these nations wisely judging that none but the best of men should be honoured with so great a trust. The other advantage their youth enjoyed was this; the instructions they received had usually a moral tendency, and were calculated to improve their minds and regulate their conduct in life. The celebrated historian Xenophon, in his life of Cyrus, tells us that the children of the ancient Persians went to school, and employed their time in learning the principles of sobriety and justice, while the children in other countries learned nothing but the arts and sciences.

It is much to be regretted that the youth in this country have not always these advantages. They have not always good

men to instruct them ; and the instructions they receive are seldom calculated to improve their hearts and regulate their conduct in life. And what avails the finest precepts when they are not recommended by a suitable practice ? what signifies teaching a boy a few sentences of Greek or Latin when he is never taught to fear God, to reverence the institutions of religion, to be temperate, honest, candid, and sincere ? The consequences are as easily to be seen as they are deeply to be deplored ; a disorderly and licentious conduct prevails among the youth. With heart-felt pleasure we allow that there are many exceptions, many amiable and hopeful characters who promise to be blessings to society and to the Church of God. But taking them in the gross, the youth that attend our schools and universities are as debauched, as profligate, as corrupt in principle and practice as exist in any society. And what characters can we hope to find at the head of our fleets and armies ? What characters can we hope to find at the bar, in the pulpit, in the British Senate, in the most public and important stations, when they are fill-

ed from nurseries of infidelity, dissipation, and vice?

In short, nothing is more wanting in our seminaries of learning than that the Masters of them should be *Christians* as well as *Scholars*, *religious* as well as *learned*, and should be as careful to form the minds and morals of our youth, as to form their taste, and to adorn them with useful and ornamental learning. The man who teaches them to correct their tempers, to subdue their passions, to moderate their desires, and govern their lives by the laws of religion and reason, "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God;" that man does more to civilize, to reform and improve society, than all that human laws and governments can do.

And now, my friends, what happy consequences might not be expected from such a plan of MORAL REFORM, were it seriously adopted, and prosecuted with zeal and diligence! By sowing these precious seeds what a plentiful and precious harvest might

not be reaped ! Did we begin with a *Personal Reform*, did we carry it into our *Families*, did we extend it to *Seminaries* and *Schools of Learning*, it would greatly regenerate both the present and succeeding ages ; it would tear up the evil by the very root ; it would expel from the fountain its poisonous and deadly qualities, and then the streams that issued from it would be pure, salutiferous, and sweet.

Then reformation would adorn the CHURCH. It would be freed from disorderly and scandalous members ; and “ the “ righteous nation who keep the truth “ would enter in,” and at once replenish and beautify the courts of Zion— Then reformation would adorn the STATE, for honest men would hold the reins of government, men who were patriots indeed, who, while they *talked* of the public good, had it really at *heart*. The great Senate of the Nation would not be disgraced and debased with worthless characters, abandoned libertines, infatuated gamesters, audacious blasphemers, men drowned in sensuality as deep as they are drowned in

debt ; nor would a venal mercenary band be found so base as to betray their country, and to support *any* measures for a *place* or a *pension*. Then reformation would adorn our COURTS of LAW, impartial justice would hold the balance, and “righteousness, like a peaceful stream, would glide through our happy land ;” the *rich* would not dare to oppress the *poor* in hopes that perverted law would justify his oppression, because he had the heaviest purse, for Judges would act as became the vice-generals of the righteous *and impartial Judge* of all. Then reformation would adorn our FLEETS and ARMIES : No more would horrid oaths and imprecations, blasphemy, and damnation be the language of officers and men. The fear of God would restrain them from those enormities that debase themselves, and arm God Almighty for their foe.

We should never forget that the people are the vitals of the State : and if the vitals be infected it is impossible the constitution can be sound. Did we see a once prosperous and promising family

losing its former character and verging towards ruin by a loose and disorderly conduct, we might drop the sympathetic tear, and wish that family were reformed; but the reformation can never take place till the individuals who compose it set about reforming themselves.

A mighty effort may, indeed, be made to effect a political reform where a moral reform is greatly wanting. We see, from a recent instance, that an infidel, a corrupt and debauched nation, may shake and overturn a Monarch's throne, may erect the standard of Liberty, and boldly vindicate the rights of man; but while the fountain retains its poisonous and deadly qualities, the streams must be poisonous and deadly too. And have not twenty-four millions of wretched people seen the observation verified? have they not seen sedition, rapine, and murder, spreading dissolation through the land? have they not seen a sanguinary and savage mob giving laws to their Legislators, and massacring, in their fury, eighteen thousand citizens? and where

their violence and rage will terminate, He only knows who rules the nations, and often (in righteous judgment) makes them a scourge to one another, and a scourge to themselves. One thing we may certainly predict that their political fabric, however beautiful and magnificent it may appear, will be of short duration, because it is not built upon that solid and true foundation that gives strength and stability to Empire; *a reverence for God and Religion!* The Legislators of the nation have banished religion from their assemblies, and are using every effort to banish it from their native land, while they glory in the horrid and impious character of * ATHEISTS. If

* The following anecdote gives too much reason to suspect, that the principles of the French Legislators, are *Atheism*. When one of the Convention gloried in denying the *existence of a God*, the rest of the Convention applauded him, and by that applause avowed themselves of the same opinion. His words were these; "What! Thrones overturned! Sceptres broken! Kings expire! and yet the *altar of God* remains!" —Can it be doubted that the French People, now sovereign, will be wise enough to *overthrow these alters* and those *Idols* to which their kings have hitherto made them subject? *Nature and Reason* these ought to be the Gods of

their fabric stand for any length of time, it will be the first that ever stood in the world, unsupported, unadorned with religion. Is there a wise, enlightened, and intelligent man in Europe, who does not know, that the fear of God, the belief of a Providence, and of a future state, are the great security and strength of Government. Human laws would avail but little without a sense of divine legislation ; and the most solemn sanctions of men would lose their influence unless they were enforced by the awful sanction of God. On this account the wisest legislators both of ancient and modern times have considered religion as essential to civil polity, and have exerted all their vigour to cherish and maintain it in the minds of men.—Indeed there is no truth more fully established by the history of the world, and

“ men : these are *my Gods*.—for I humbly avow to the Convention that I am an ATHEIST.”

Extracted from the speech of Citizen Dupont delivered in the National Convention at Paris on the 14th of December, in a debate on the subject of establishing Public Schools for the education of youth.

the experience of men, than that the greatness and glory of a nation consists not so much in its vast dominions, its formidable fleets and armies, as in the religion, the industry, the sobriety, and public spirit of its members: its dominions may be invaded and curtailed, its fleets and armies may be defeated, but while it retains its character, it will rise, like the ancient Romans by its disasters, and, in time of public calamity, it will draw new resources from its own healthful and vigorous constitution. Though many branches may be loped from the Tree, yet if the root remaineth sound, it will sprout again, yea it will derive new life and vigour from the pruning knife, and will flourish more luxuriant than before, or to paint the image in the style of Job; “ There is hope of such a Tree,
 “ though it be cut down, that it will
 “ sprout again; and that the tender
 “ branch thereof will not cease; for tho’
 “ the root wax old in the earth, yet
 “ through the scent of water, it will bud
 “ and bring forth boughs like a plant.”

If we take a general survey of the history of man, we shall find that nations were great or they were insignificant, they enjoyed Liberty, or they groaned under oppression, just in proportion as they maintained or lost their character— From ancient history we see that the *Lacedemonians*, the *Thebans*, the *Athenians*, the *Romans*, the *Carthaginians*, all these celebrated States regained their liberty and reformed their constitution and government, when they were a brave, a hardy, a sober, and industrious people; and so soon as they lost their character, they lost their liberty, and became the slaves of artful, bold and enterprizing Tyrants. The same is exemplified in modern history, the *United Provinces*, the *Swiss Cantons*, the *British Nation*, all of them overturned the throne of Tyrants, claimed and asserted the rights of man, when their character was great and venerable. In some of them the want of moral health has produced a political decline, and it requires not the spirit of prophecy to foretel that nothing but the restoration of the first can prevent

the fatal progress of the last.—From these observations it is easy to see,

1st. That Religion and righteousness are the *genuine sources* of national peace and prosperity. While they give serenity to the christian's mind and dignity to his character, they give prosperity to his country and glory to his God.—It were easy to shew that all the calamities that disturb the peace and destroy the prosperity of nations are owing to the want of religion and virtue, and to the abounding of immorality and vice ; that no degree of wealth, no extent of trade, no armaments by sea and land, can support and preserve a people, when vice and immorality obtain universal empire. Such an empire they bid fair to obtain in the present age. Our national prosperity is unparalleled in the page of history ; but national prosperity has always produced luxury, luxury has produced licentiousness, idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of mind and manners ; these have degraded and debased society, they have destroyed private vir-

tue and public spirit, and precipitated the decline and downfall of the greatest kingdoms. If these evils are not checked in their fatal progress, they will soon destroy that magnificent *Constitutional Fabric* which our fathers built, and built at the expence of much blood and treasure. The foundation of it was laid at the glorious Revolution, after-ages added to its beauty and splendor; but while it received gradual improvements, through length of time it may have received damages too, and if it has, wise and virtuous Legislators will undoubtedly repair them, and will even amend and improve the original plan, where the matured experience of ages has found material defects. This will allay our political ferment, will hush the rising storm into a calm; and peace, and love, and harmony, will bless the happy realm.

2d. Be persuaded, Brethren, that a **PERSONAL REFORM** is the most important of all reforms to *you*. Amidst the commotions of the *present* times there is much reason to fear that many are keen

to act the *Politician* who are little concerned to act the *Christian*. Their zeal is great to reform the State, but where is their zeal to reform their own conversation. Where defects abound, every reform must be desirable ; but in a *comparative* point of view, the one is a trifle, the other is of the greatest magnitude. What is it to a follower of Jesus, a candidate for a crown of life, a poor pilgrim who is hastening out of time to eternity, what is it to him, (comparatively speaking) whether the duration of Parliament be three or seven years? but it is of everlasting importance to him that he be a good man, that he be renewed in the spirit of his mind, that he be holy in all manner of conversation, that he be living in the faith of an eternal world, and looking "for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

3d. Let me exhort *you*, Brethren, to set about this *personal*, this *radical reform* without DELAY. Another of your precious years is gone, and with many, I

fear, the reform is not begun. Thoughtless about eternal things, or flattering yourselves that you will have time enough afterwards to consider them, you sleep away your precious days and years, and leave the work undone. Thus many are infatuated, and perish by the infatuation. Did you consider the uncertainty of human life, the importance of the work you have to do, and the dreadful hazard of neglecting it, you would seize the precious moments as they fly, and “give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.”—Did you see the husband man prodigal of his time when his fields were lying waste and desolate; did you see the General of an army lolling on the cup of pleasure, when the enemy was preparing to storm his camp, would you not conclude they were thoughtless and infatuated mortals? But is the christian chargeable with less infatuation who wastes away the precious time of life, while his heart lies like the long neglected field; while the most formidable enemy is

watching an opportunity to attack and overthrow him ?

4th, Let those who have hitherto refused to be reformed, and hardened themselves in an evil course, notwithstanding many mercies received, many warnings given, and many awful threatenings denounced, let them read and ponder the words that I have chosen for a text, “ If ye will not be reformed by
 “ me, by these things, but will walk contrary unto me, I will also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you
 “ yet seven times for your sins.”—While yet the precious day of life remains ; while peace, and pardon, grace, and glory, may be freely had, O listen, sinners, to the voice of God ; be wise, be good, be happy, e’er too late.

Lastly, this exercise shews us who is the genuine *Patriot*, the friend of King, Constitution and Country ; it is the man who is the genuine *Christian*, the friend of religion and righteousness. Religion is not a selfish, but a generous and diffusive

principle. As he who possesses it is blessed, so he is a blessing. Though his religion, like his charity, begins at home, it does not terminate there, but is carried into his *family*, into his *neighbourhood*, into the *Church* of God, into the *world* at large, where he is called to sojourn. It resembles a wave which is formed by throwing a pebble into a pool of water; the wave spreads wider and wider, till it forms a vast circumference. The interest of Religion, the order of Society, the good of his Country, the glory of his God, all are embraced by his enlightened, his regenerated, and enlarged soul. This constitutes the greatest and the best of characters, it makes the saints on earth resemble the saints in heaven, where the glow of divine benevolence warms every heart, and circulates through all the climes of bliss.

THE END.



